

CHIP legislation, which was a tremendous breakthrough in terms of health care coverage for young people. He has worked with me extensively on community health center legislation.

At a time when the eyes of our Nation are focused on international crises, I want to draw some attention to the incredible crisis at home with respect to health care. We have millions of citizens who are not old enough for Medicare. They are not poor enough for Medicaid. Small businesses are being crushed by annual premiums. Physicians are leaving the system. Older people are not able to afford their medicine. This Congress, with the ingenuity and the talent in this Chamber, can come up with a health care system that works for all Americans.

Toward that end, I have been very gratified that the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, the senior Senator from Utah, has joined me for a substantial time. We are going to stay at it until we get our proposal on the floor and the Congress breaks with this 57-year gridlock on the health care issue, gridlock that dates back to the days of Harry Truman. We can do it with some bipartisanship, which is what the Senator from Utah and I have tried to offer.

I will talk more about this next week when Coverage for the Uninsured Week begins across the country.

I thank again the Senator from Utah and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GRAHAM of South Carolina). The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. I thank my dear colleague from Oregon for his leadership in this area. When he was in the House, he was one of the great leaders on health care issues. He is repeating that leadership in the Senate. It is a privilege to work with him because you can rely on him. When he says he will do something, he does it. He is very intelligent in health care matters. I have a lot of respect for him, and it is a privilege to work with him. I hope people will listen to the bill that we will present because it is the way to at least move us off the dime and get us to do what we should be doing on health care. I thank him and pay tribute to him this morning.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I appreciate the courtesy of the Senator from Utah. We are going to move to the Estrada nomination in executive session. However, prior to doing that, Senator ROBERTS and I are here. We have long served on the Ethics Committee, and we have a statement we wish to give. Senator HATCH has agreed that we can do so prior to going to executive session.

I ask unanimous consent that Senator ROBERTS and I be allowed to speak. As far as the time after that is concerned, we do not believe it needs to be equally divided. If Senator HATCH wants to take all the time, he can do that. I don't think we have anybody who wishes to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO VICTOR BAIRD

Mr. REID. Mr. President, when I was first elected to the Senate, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out the committee structure. It is different than it is in the House. But I learned quickly that here, as in the House, the work gets done in committees.

I was fortunate early to be asked to serve on the Appropriations Committee and the Public Works Committee. I have served on these committees since I have been in the Senate. In these committees, I saw that the two ingredients necessary for successful operation of a committee were to make sure that there was not extreme partisanship and that we and a good, competent staff.

I have served in the majority and the minority while a Member of the Senate. I have been ranking member of a subcommittee, a chairman of a subcommittee. I have been chairman of a full committee on two separate occasions.

But regardless of which capacity I have served in, these ingredients remain constant.

Though I enjoyed the benefits of both good staff and bipartisanship during my years on these excellent committees, I was uncertain what to expect when I was asked to serve on the Committee on Ethics. I soon discovered that that committee was no different from any of the others, that you need a good staff and nonpartisanship.

It has been a tremendous pleasure for me to work with Senator PAT ROBERTS of Kansas. We have worked through some very difficult issues while we have served as chairman and ranking member of the committee. As we all know, Senator ROBERTS has a great sense of humor. But that sense of humor is never, ever in the way of doing the right thing for this institution. He is a person who served for many decades in the Congress, and his service here in the Senate has been a rewarding one for Members of the Senate because he has brought his experience from the House and made this place a better institution. I can speak with authority in that regard as a result of how he handled himself on the Ethics Committee during the time he and I served as chairman and ranking member or vice versa.

It is a disappointment to me that he is no longer chairman of that committee, but the rules are such that he could not serve in that capacity while serving in the same capacity on another committee. I look forward to working with Senator VOINOVICH, who has replaced him. I only hope that he is half as good in that capacity as Senator ROBERTS. If that is the case, the Senate will be well served.

The Senate Ethics Committee is truly a unique committee. Unlike other committees, it is comprised of an

even number of Democrats and Republicans. It is led by a chair and vice chair. The staff is entirely nonpartisan. Most significantly, the committee's obligation is to ensure that Members of this body adhere to the high ethical standards expected of them as Members of the Senate. This is an obligation that transcends partisan political differences.

I have had the honor of serving on the Ethics Committee for a long time. I have had the privilege of being both the chair and the vice chair of the committee. Throughout all my time, however, the individual responsible for the day-to-day management of this committee has been Victor Baird. In fact, Victor has served on the Ethics Committee since 1987 as the staff director and chief counsel.

He has guided the committee through some of its most controversial cases. Regardless of the case or the controversy, however, Victor Baird could be relied on to steer the committee with a degree of impartiality, calmness, and firmness that will be a model for his successors.

It is significant to note that Victor Baird is leaving the Ethics Committee to enjoy a rich and deserved retirement. His career path is a tribute to those who look at public service as a possibility.

Prior to coming to the Senate, Victor served on the Consumers' Utility Council of Georgia, was an administrative law judge in Georgia, and served as an assistant attorney general of Georgia.

He also is another son of Georgia who found his calling in public service and is finishing his career serving the greatest deliberative body in the world. Like other Georgians in the Senate, Victor enjoyed a distinguished career in the U.S. military. He was honorably discharged in 1970 from the U.S. Air Force and was a recipient of the Bronze Star. During his 3 years in the Air Force, he served as a meteorologist and was responsible for predicting tropical storms. I am sure the storms that came after he took this job at the Ethics Committee were certainly more than any of the storms he saw in the non-political environment. I am sure that Victor's ability to forecast stormy weather served him well in the Senate.

Victor Baird's professional career is marked by serving the public. That alone deserves our commendation. It is unfortunate today that public service is viewed as a short-time venture for some, but I believe it is a noble calling. The financial rewards are few and the hours can be very long. Those who commit their lives to public service retire knowing their work, no matter how great or how small, has contributed to the betterment of society. That alone is a reward that cannot be quantified in dollars.

Mr. President, on behalf of the Senate, I wish to thank Victor Baird for his 15 years of service on the Select Committee on Ethics. Victor's contributions to the betterment of this institution are significant. The Senate

has long recognized that public service is a public trust. Today there is greater trust in our Government and in this institution as a result of Victor Baird's service on the Senate Select Committee on Ethics.

I will miss calling Victor at home at night, trying to find out where he is because there is a question that has to be answered immediately. I am sure in some ways he will miss me. But I certainly wish Victor the very best in his retirement. He has been a public servant I will always admire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, first, I wish to sincerely thank my distinguished colleague and my dear friend from Nevada—Searchlight, NV, by the way—Senator REID, for his very kind comments.

It has been a team effort in behalf of Senator REID and myself as we have tried to serve—some people would say sentenced to—the Ethics Committee. But we have been very conscientious in fulfilling this duty, and I think we have done so with Senator REID's unique ability to not only come up with what is right, according to the ethics manual, but what is basically common sense. As a matter of fact, Senator REID has this notion that continually is expressed: Gee, PAT, we ought to sit down and really see if we can rewrite the ethics manual to make it actually understood by Members of the Senate and reform it, make it adhere to a criterion—a yardstick, if you will—of common sense.

I always tried to dissuade him from that. No. 1, I did not want to undertake that mountain to climb, and it would be a big mountain to climb, because just as soon as you start that, why, other Members add other mountains.

At any rate, Senator REID has been a joy to work with. I admire his leadership. He is soft spoken and, as I have indicated, has brought a lot of common sense and has tried to make the Ethics Committee proactive and very helpful to Members. As a matter of fact, with every new class of Senators that comes in, we have a briefing, and HARRY always points out: Ask; ask first before there is any problem. And that is certainly good advice.

I thank Senator REID for his very kind remarks. I do not know about the decades of public service that I have accrued. Gosh, decades sounds like a long time. I may be fossilized here before we are through with these remarks. I am an old piece of furniture around here, I guess, in the House and Senate.

With that experience comes at least some expertise and some real appreciation in behalf of certain staff. We are only as good as our staff, I do not care whether you are an individual Member's staff, committee staff, select committee staff, whatever. It is a real honor for me to offer a few brief remarks for our outgoing Senate Ethics staff director, Mr. Victor Baird.

He has 16 years of service, and he now leaves this to enter retirement and, doubtlessly, what will be a new phase of life. His retirement is certainly well deserved, but his absence will be a great loss to the Senate.

Sometimes the most important positions are the ones that go unacknowledged. This is certainly true with the staff director of the Ethics Committee. It is one of the few positions where accolades do not really accrue. Only when a storm or controversy presents does the spotlight focus on the staff director. When this occurs, the director faces intense challenges from all angles, including media scrutiny, public outcry, and, yes, even partisan bickering. Yet he endures all this for one supreme objective, and this is what Victor did—to preserve the integrity of this institution we call the United States Senate.

For almost a decade and a half, why, Victor Baird has assumed this thankless but important job. It is a job requiring keen attention to detail, mastery of the rules, and a precise level of foresight on how ethics rulings affect the Senate, not only in the present but for future generations. Just as the Sergeant at Arms and Capitol Police guard the physical structure of the Senate, Victor Baird guarded the reputation of these halls. He accomplished this by insistence that Members adhere and remain accountable to high ethical standards.

During his tenure, he guided the Senate through some very tumultuous times that often really threatened the reputation of the Senate. As we all know, a compromised reputation will diminish credibility, and diminished credibility threatens a mandate to govern. It is that important. With this loss, our whole system of checks and balances would suffer which is vital to the strength of our democracy. All of us, regardless of what side of the aisle we sit on, should understand this.

Thankfully, Victor handled all ethics proceedings, and particularly those with intense media focus, judiciously, without staining the dignity of the Senate. He safeguarded us. This is not an easy task, and all of us should be very grateful.

The Senate is unlike any other governing body in the world. Deliberative by design, it exists to make sure we thoroughly consider our actions. In a town fueled by hotly charged emotions that often makes decisions for the moment, thankfully Victor was always available for advice and counsel.

My friend and colleague, Senator REID, and I often sought his well-reasoned, objective legal opinions. We respected his vast institutional knowledge and understanding of how this body should conduct itself. When dealing with ethics issues, it is important Members rise above partisan politics, which is hard to do sometimes, and examine each issue on a case-by-case basis. This is what our Founding Fathers intended. Maintaining the Sen-

ate's distinguished legacy is a task all of us must assume, regardless of politics. Victor knows this; Victor knew this, and always kept this premise at the forefront of his responsibilities.

His most important contribution was understanding that the committee's ultimate goal was proactive and preventive in nature. He made sure that all Members and their staff knew the rules of acceptable conduct at the outset. In public office, innocent mistakes can quickly break a career. This is why the Ethics Committee, and in particular the staff director, is so important. He is the gatekeeper. He is the adviser. He is the counselor to us all. Victor Baird certainly filled each of these roles with the utmost professionalism and integrity.

On behalf of the entire Senate, we thank you for your service and your dedication, Victor. Your influence has preserved the reputation of this governing body for the past 16 years, and we salute you.

In the U.S. Marine Corps, we always conclude by saying: Semper Fi. That means always faithful.

You have been always faithful, Victor. Semper Fi.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I join my colleagues, the distinguished minority floor leader from Nevada, who is a dear friend of the distinguished Senator from Kansas, and my dear friend from Kansas, in paying tribute to Victor Baird. That is one of the most miserable, tough jobs I think in the whole Senate. As both of them have said, there is not a lot of thanks for doing it. I personally thank him for the efforts he has put forward, and those who worked with him, because this is a very difficult job. He has always been straightforward, honest, and decent in all of the experiences I know about. I join my colleagues in their remarks and ask that I be associated with their remarks. I wish him the very best.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. If my friend will yield—and I have already cleared this with the distinguished chairman of the Judiciary Committee—when the Senator from Utah finishes his statement and we go into executive session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Vermont be recognized following the statement of the Senator from Utah for up to 12 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.